

# The Making of Muslim Youths II

On 6-7 October 2007 the second of a two-part workshop “The Making of Muslim Youths: New Cultural Politics in the Global South and North” (see *ISIM Review*, no. 16 for a report on the first workshop), was held at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague. Co-organized by Linda Herrera of the ISS and Asef Bayat of ISIM, the workshop joined seventeen scholars from, and working on, issues involving Muslim youth from Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, and the Middle East.

These two workshops have provided a platform for scholars carrying out empirically innovative and theoretically informed research on topics pertaining to the culture and politics of Muslim youth. The emerging attention to Muslim youth derives in part from the current demographic shift, or “youth bulge” in numerous Muslim majority countries. While often referred to as the “builders of the future” by the power elite, the young are also stigmatized and feared as “disruptive” agents who are prone to radicalism and deviation. Although gender, class, and cultural divisions may render untenable a homogenous treatment of youths, or even call into question “youth” as an analytical category, it is equally true that the young undeniably share a certain important habitus, which is recognized by both the young themselves as well as by the political and moral establishment and authority.

To be sure, the presence of a youthful population has caused a remarkable change in the social composition of youth who have assumed a central, if complex, place in the political economy and cultures of these societies. At the same time, youth cultures are developing in novel, yet little understood ways due to a combination of the shifting moral politics at home, the relentless process of cultural and economic globalization, the geopolitics of neo-imperialism, the rise of a civilizational discourse in which “Islam” is positioned in opposition to the “West,” sluggish economies, and wide scale unemployment. Young peoples’ expressions of interests, aspirations, and socioeconomic capacities appear to be producing a new cultural politics. In other words, the cultural behavior of Muslim youths can be understood as located in the political realm and representing a new arena of contestation for power.

The workshop interrogated the cultural politics of youth from the perspective of the youths themselves, from the viewpoint of political and moral authorities who consider it their role to discipline, control, and formulate policies for the young, and from an understanding of market and media forces where youth are heavily targeted and represented.

The papers were organized around six themes; the first of which was Locating Muslim Youth. Asef Bayat and AbduMaliq Simon conceptualized contemporary notions of youth with particular attention to the relationship between youth and the city in comparative perspective. The session on Youth Cultures and Subcultures joined Sophie Sauvegrain, Suzanne Naafs, and Gusel Sabirova who examined the intersection of the global with the local through inquiries into youth consumption in Syria, representations of young women in popular culture in Indonesia, and women’s pietistic movements in Russia, respectively. The third theme, Youth Participation and Generational Shifts with Marloes Janson, Shamshul Baharuddin, and Azam Khattam, focused on issues of new patterns of authority and politics in the Gambia, Malaysia, and Iran. In the session on Multiculturalism and Citizenship, Schirin Amir-Moazami and Moustapha Bayoumi looked at debates around and practices of Muslim minority youth in North American and Europe. In the session on the Politics of Education together with André Mazawi, Linda Herrera and Nabil Al-Tikriti examined how educational policies meant to shape the young are often conditioned by geopolitics and crises of national identity. Finally, the panel on Radicalism and Identity Politics with Noorhaidi Hassan, Mohamed Khan, and Suzanne Hammad critically examined the category “radical” and investigated organization of youth politics.

The organizers are planning to co-edit a volume with the papers from the two workshops.

Linda Herrera is Senior Lecturer of Development Studies at the Institute of Social Studies.  
Email: [herrera@iss.nl](mailto:herrera@iss.nl)

**LINDA HERRERA**